

Wanted: Self-motivated NCOs to build the Army's next generation

By Sgt. Jimmy Norris

While the U.S. Army is composed entirely of volunteers, the Army is hoping more NCOs will step up to the challenge of recruiting and volunteer to help build its next generation.

Given the extra hours, life away from Army facilities such as military hospitals and post exchanges and the pressures of meeting a regular monthly mission, Recruiting may be an unappealing prospect to many NCOs.

In fact, this year only 35 percent of the Army's Recruiters volunteered for the duty. The rest were detailed by the career branches to spend three years helping the Army meet its manpower needs.

"It's most definitely a challenging and stressful job," said Sgt. 1st Class Keith Mills, Recruiting Special Missions NCOIC, U.S. Army Recruiting Command. "But the opportunities and benefits will enhance your military career and also prepare you for the civilian sector."

Recruiters receive \$450 a month Special Duty Pay, \$75 a month expense allowance and their choice of assignments when Recruiting duty is over. In addition, Recruiters receive – free of charge – the Army Blue uniform.

Recruiters also enjoy a little more stability than other Soldiers.

"People coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan who want some stability should give Recruiting a try," Recruiter of the Year Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Downs said. "For the past three years I've spent every night sleeping in my bed with my wife."

According to Mills, Soldiers stay at the same duty station the entire three years they're assigned as Recruiters. Those who choose to reclassify and make Recruiting a career do not stay at the same duty station for the rest of their careers, he said, but it is possible for them to stay with the same battalion.

There are also incentives for success. Recruiters work on a point system, receiving an average of 20 points for each successful enlistment, and an additional 20 points when their recruits graduate from basic



Photo by Master Sgt. Rudy Carter, Fort Jackson, S.C., Public Affairs NCOIC



Above: Staff Sgt. John Kirby takes down information from 21-year-old applicant William Coburn. Left: A Recruiter talks with a potential recruit about possible career paths.

U.S. Army Photo

training. After earning 1,200 points, Recruiters receive a gold Recruiter badge. Once they earn another 1,200 points, they earn the Recruiter ring. Recruiters who earn their rings within 36 months receive meritorious promotions. When they earn another 2,400 points, for a total of 4,800, Recruiters receive the Glen E. Morrell Award, a medallion that marks the pinnacle of Recruiting achievement.

Even if Recruiters don't earn their rings, Recruiting still helps NCOs become more competitive with their peers for promotions. According to Mills, 74.5 percent of Recruiters in the primary zone for promotion to sergeant first class during the 2002 promotion board were selected for promotion. The Army average was only 33.6 percent.

Recruiting also helps NCOs build skills and knowledge that will be valuable to them for years after they've left Recruiting.

"What job can better prepare you for the transition back to life as a civilian?" asked Downs, a former heavy engineer who volunteered for Recruiting duty and is now assigned in Jacksonville, Fla.

Downs who became a career Recruiter in September, said Recruiting also gives NCOs skills that directly relate to civilian jobs including counseling, sales and recruiting for civilian companies. "You're out there alone with [no military facilities] networking with police, mayors and school principals, doing all the networking most people wait until they're at 19 years and change to do."

"Basically what you're doing is finding quality employees for a major corporation," he said. "Who wouldn't want to hire someone with X number of years experience in human relations?"

The benefits to recruiting don't stop at material gains, said Staff Sgt. Michael Oganowski, a Field Artillery forward observer who was detailed into Recruiting duty and assigned to a Recruiting station in Manchester, Conn.

"I really enjoy helping people out. It's a good feeling when you put someone in the Army who really needs it," he said. "A lot of the people here are from lower income neighborhoods. They tell me there are fights going on and they hear gunshots every night and they really need to get out of here. There was one high school senior who had been abandoned at the age of 11. He was living in a shelter when I [enlisted] him in the Army. Even though he went into the Infantry and got deployed; he still thanks me."

Downs also describes Recruiting as a rewarding experience.

"The thing I like the most is when you take the rough draft of a person, the 17-to 21-year-old college dropout or high school graduate with the droopy pants and the hat turned sideways and no military discipline at all, and you [get them to enlist in the Army]. Then, when they come back home and you see the Soldier they've become," he said. "I can't tell you how many postcards and letters I get from parents saying 'Thanks for what you did for my son. He was going nowhere.' or 'He was sweeping floors at Wal-Mart. Now he's a combat engineer and he's going to college.'"

While there are many incentives for becoming a Recruiter, both Downs and Oganowski warn that it's not for everybody.



Photo by Master Sgt. Rudy Carter, Fort Jaskcon, S.C., Public Affairs NCOIC

Spc. James Buenaventura asks Sgt. Vinh Pham questions as they role play during class at the U.S. Army Recruiting and Retention School at Fort Jackson, S.C.

"It's tough because my children are asleep when I leave for work in the morning and they're asleep when I get home at night," said Oganowski. "It's also very stressful because you're constantly under pressure to accomplish the mission."

"If you're the kind of Soldier who accepts the minimum, don't come out here," added Downs, "You have to be self-motivated and self-disciplined."

Oganowski plans to return to Field Artillery in April.

Downs will tour various installations throughout the Army and give briefings to prospective volunteers as part of the Army's Recruit the Recruiter program. He offers a bit of sage advice which he said applies not only to Recruiting, but to retention, as well.

"How many people have sat on the line, being three people short in their squads and said, 'we need more Soldiers'?" Downs asked. "You can either quit complaining, or get out there and be part of the solution."

NCOs who are interested in Recruiting should visit the U.S. Army Recruiting Command Web site at <http://www.usarec.army.mil>, or call 1-800-223-3735, extension 6-1860/6-1028 for more information.